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14. ABSTRACT The United States is transitioning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and placing increased emphasis on a more holistic engagement with foreign and interagency partners in order to combat terrorism and foster better diplomatic relations, as emphasized in the National Security Strategy. This discussion will focus on cultural self-awareness as it relates to successful cross-cultural education in the military reinforcing the contention that service members need competence that is gained from education and experience that prepares them to engage with different cultures. The paper will analyze military cross-cultural competence using the academic disciplines of anthropology and psychology to provide entry points to develop the discussion. It is intended to demonstrate the central role of cultural self-awareness as a milestone in developing the cultural competence. With the emphasis on Irregular Warfare and interagency cooperation, intercultural exchanges will become more important to the success of national policy in the future. The success of the cross-cultural education will be depend on service members who can develop the skills necessary to function in interagency environments as well with foreign cultures. The development of cultural self-awareness is a crucial step towards achieving that essential cross-cultural competence.					
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Marine Corps University  
2076 South Street  
Marine Corps Combat Development Command  
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**TITLE: CULTURAL SELF-AWARENESS AS A CRUCIAL COMPONENT OF  
MILITARY CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCE**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**AUTHOR: LCDR Constantine J. Pappamihel, USNR**

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. Paula Holmes-Eber

Approved: 

Date: 8 April 2013

Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. Jonathan Phillips

Approved: 

Date: 8 April 2013

Oral Defense Committee Member: LTC Michael Lewis, USA

Approved: 

Date: 8 Apr 13

## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** Cultural Self-Awareness as a Central Component of Military Cross-Cultural Competence

**Author:** Lieutenant Commander, Constantine J. Pappamihel, United States Navy Reserve

**Thesis:** Cross-cultural competence is dependent on understanding the influence of personal cultural narrative. Military cultural education programs need to emphasize cultural self-awareness through professional military education in order to develop the baseline competence needed to engage effectively with other cultures, whether they are foreign societies, interagency, or other service cultures.

**Discussion:** The United States is transitioning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and placing increased emphasis on a more holistic engagement with foreign and interagency partners in order to combat terrorism and foster better diplomatic relations, as emphasized in the National Security Strategy. Whether termed Irregular Warfare, Counter-Insurgency Operations, Unconventional Warfare, Irregular Warfare, Foreign Internal Defense, or Military Diplomacy, the military's role in these operations requires successful engagement with cultures that are much different than our own. This discussion will focus on cultural self-awareness as it relates to successful cross-cultural engagement for the military and will reinforce the contention that service members need competence that is gained from education and experience that prepares them to engage with different cultures. The paper will analyze military cross-cultural competence using the academic disciplines of anthropology and psychology to provide entry points to develop the discussion. This is not an in-depth comparison of culture general education versus culture specific training. However it is intended to demonstrate the central role of cultural self-awareness as a milestone in developing the cultural competence that is needed by the military in carrying out our National Security Strategy.

**Conclusion:** With the emphasis on Irregular Warfare and interagency cooperation intercultural exchanges will become more important to the success of national policy in the future. The success of the Department of Defense (DOD) will be dependent on selecting suitable service members who can develop the skills necessary to function in interagency environments as well with foreign cultures. The development of cultural self-awareness is a crucial step towards achieving that essential cross-cultural competence.

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## Preface

Culture and cultural self-identity are ideas that all societies and people use to interact with others but we rarely give much thought to in our day-to-day lives. My personal wake up call began when I left active duty in the to attend Physician Assistant school in Philadelphia. I had left my career of 15 years as a Navy SEAL and as a senior instructor at the Joint Special Operations Medical Training Center to become a civilian and one of many students at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. In addition to being the oldest student in the class I was forced to look at myself in the mirror and realize that my previous persona as a Navy SEAL was guiding nearly all of my interactions with my classmates and coworkers whether I realized it or not. I soon realized, through some not so subtle intervention by friends, that I needed to reevaluate the way I interact with my peers. Thankfully I had those close friends and mentors to help me look at myself more critically, thank you Michelle, Al, and Russ.

That development has continued over the years throughout my career as a Physician Assistant, Naval Officer, and now again as a graduate student writing about cultural self-awareness at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College. While introspection and self-study has helped me to finally grow-up, maybe, this is more about improving my ability to communicate with the world around me. Also while there as scores of people who have contributed in some way to this “maturity” this paper would not have been possible without the mentorship of LTC Michael Lewis USA, Dr. Allison Abbe, and Dr. Brian Selmeski. Thank you for your guidance and patience. Dr. Paula Holmes-Eber, thank you for taking on the unenviable task of being my mentor, your patience, and pushing me to continually improve on communicating my ideas and writing.

Lastly I want to thank my sister, Dr. Eleni Pappamihel, this paper would not have been possible without your guidance, **motivation**, and patience, I love you Sis...

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Disclaimer.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Preface.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Background.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. What is Cross-Cultural Competence.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4. Ethnocentrism/Ethnorelativism.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>5. Cultural Self-Awareness/Self-Identity.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>6. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>7. Citations.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>8. Bibliography.....</b>	<b>26</b>



## Introduction

*If you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know your enemies but do know yourself, you will win one and lose one; if you do not know your enemies nor yourself you will be imperiled and lose every single battle.<sup>1</sup> - Sun Tzu*

Sun Tzu may not have been versed in cross-cultural competence but he clearly understood that self-awareness could be as important to winning wars as knowledge of the enemy in warfare. So why is self-awareness so important and what role does this knowledge have in military operations? It is important simply because who “we” are guides how we communicate, our actions, and how others interpret our words and actions. When we communicate with cultural others we understand them through our own cultural narrative and they see us through their own cultural lens. This process of understanding occurs in a nearly unconscious manner unless one is attuned to actual process itself, being attuned to that process is cultural self-awareness.

The future of conflict for the U.S. military involves a spectrum of military operations that includes Irregular Warfare, Counter-Insurgency Operations, Hybrid Warfare, Unconventional Warfare, Foreign Internal Defense, and Military Diplomacy. Cross-cultural engagement is a key component of these typically small foot print military operations that fall within that spectrum of warfare. Successful engagement during these operations, where clothing, body language/actions, or what town a person is from can communicate as much if not more than words and requires more than language training. We must be able to appreciate the influence of our own cultural narrative and how that narrative influences the ways in which we engage with other cultures. We must move these cultural influences to the forefront of our own awareness.



These cross-cultural engagements will require individuals who have the competence to work successfully across a multitude of culturally different scenarios. As discussed in the *Department of Defense Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities* developing this cross-cultural competence is a priority for the U.S. military.<sup>2</sup> In cross-cultural engagements human capital is prime and competence is everything. A person who insults the village elder or inadvertently kills the village ox can override any positive outcomes from the person who understands that the elder and the village depend on that ox for more than just labor and adversely effect future engagements for months or years.

For the purposes of this discussion we utilize a definition of cross-cultural competence provided by Selmeski for the military.

*The ability to quickly and accurately comprehend, then appropriately and effectively engage individuals from distinct cultural backgrounds to achieve the desired effect.*

1. *Despite not having an in-depth knowledge of the other culture, and*
2. *Even though fundamental aspects of the other culture may contradict one's own taken-for-granted assumptions/deeply-held beliefs.*<sup>3</sup>

This paper will elaborate further on the role of cross-cultural competence and proposes that cross-cultural competence cannot be fully attained without understanding the influence that cultural narrative has on interactions with cultural others, whether they are foreign societies, other agencies or other services.

## Background

*I believe that our national security lies not just in protecting our borders, but in bridging divides.*<sup>4</sup>

*-- Senator Joe Lieberman*

To appreciate the importance of developing cultural competence within the military one need not look much further than the priorities set forth by the President and Secretary of Defense. President Obama's speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in August of 2009 emphasized the need for increased cultural engagement by our armed forces to support military operations in the future. He stated, "And across the force, we're investing in new skills and specialties, because in the 21st century, military strength will be measured not only by the weapons our troops carry, but by the languages they speak and the cultures that they understand."<sup>5</sup> The *Defense Strategic Guidance for 2012* continues this discussion and places emphasis on maintaining a force that can support the National Security Strategy anywhere in the world.<sup>6</sup> To fulfill this strategic effort will require a greater dependence on a General-Purpose Forces (GPF) that has the ability to work effectively across a multitude of cultures. This effort has the effect of refocusing the military on becoming more versatile and prioritizing the need for developing cross-cultural competence.

Looking back to 2011 the Department of Defense published a roadmap for addressing the future of language, regional expertise, and culture training for the military. The plan recognized that the requirement to conduct irregular warfare, security, stabilization, and humanitarian operations would involve the efforts of the total force.<sup>7</sup> It states, "To further prepare service members to operate effectively in any cross-cultural environment, this objective will institutionalize cross-cultural competence by building and implementing a roadmap for managing, measuring, and sustaining these competencies for the Total Force."<sup>8</sup> The plan placed a

great deal of emphasis on developing cultural general competence simply because it is and will be difficult to predict where service-members will be required to deploy in the future.<sup>9</sup>

As the military works to further this cross-cultural competence and improve the cultural capability of the force it is worth mentioning that the benefit of developing this competence is not limited to interaction with foreign societies. One of the key tenets of the last Quadrennial Defense Review is strengthening affiliations with federal civilian agencies to increase the effectiveness of interagency collaboration.<sup>10</sup> The challenge often faced during these interagency collaborations and joint operations is one of effective communication and how to interpret and respond appropriately during these cross-agency interactions.

Lisa Delpit is an educator who has authored many texts on the influence of culture in education and also on how to minimize its impact on communication in cross-cultural classrooms. She believes that cultural self-awareness is not only helpful but also crucial for effective cross-cultural communication. “We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs. To put our beliefs on hold is to cease to exist as ourselves for a moment — and that is not easy.”<sup>11</sup> She realized that cultural introspection is a challenge but emphasized that it is necessary for effective cross-cultural communication between educators and students in increasingly culturally diverse classrooms.

Often it is very easy to lose sight of the influence that history and culture can have on individual members until they have to interact with other agencies that have a very different organizational culture. Service members enter the military with their own cultural identity influenced by their family, ethnic, or social groups and are then acculturated into a particular service culture so they can function effectively as part of that organization. The old joke about how each service defines “secure that building” comes to mind with each service’s connotation of the phrase serving as the punch line for the joke and helps to illustrate the difference in service

cultures.<sup>1</sup> This process also occurs within the civilian agencies that the military partners with to carry out the U.S. National Security Strategy and includes federal agencies as well as non-governmental agencies and emphasizes the role culture on communication between various organizational cultures.

The *National Security Strategy* sets the priorities for the how the U.S. pursues its national security interests. As the quote below reveals fulfilling those priorities includes interaction with foreign cultures in addition, to effective cooperation between governmental agencies, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations and business interests.

*Our military will continue strengthening its capacity to partner with foreign counterparts, train and assist security forces, and pursue military-to-military ties with a broad range of governments...*

*Time and again, we have seen that the best ambassadors for American values and interests are the American people—our businesses, nongovernmental organizations, scientists, athletes, artists, military service members, and students.<sup>12</sup> (2010 National Security Strategy)*

Developing cross-cultural competence not only in the military but across all federal agencies will facilitate implementation of U.S. national strategy. The initial challenge in developing this competence in the force is that we understand what we are trying to achieve and understand cross-cultural competence. Because the different academic disciplines often do not agree on a universal definition of culture it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide that universal definition. However that disparity does help illustrate the challenge ahead for developing an understanding of cross-cultural competence and implementing an effective educational program.

While the characterizations of culture can be broad and often difficult to define, the military is faced with the reality of developing culturally competent practitioners who can

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<sup>1</sup> “Secure that Building” The Navy will turn out the lights and lock the door, The Army will place an MP at the door and ensure everyone has authorization to enter, The Marines will set up fields of fire and call in an air strike, The Air Force will take out a 2-year lease with option to buy.

successfully interact with others outside of their culture to fulfill the goals of the *National Security Strategy*. Additionally because culture is about people and the way they behave within their society it cannot be distilled down to a list of facts gained from reading a country book or something that can be understood as a terrain feature in battlefield. In essence, countries do not have cultures; the people within them do. Their cultures are conglomerations of influences from the dominant cultures within their societies and the variety of sub-cultures they belong to. Additionally people will react differently when interacting with others who understand their cultural context and share in-group status and those who are considered cultural outsiders.

The competence required for the military to be successful involves the ability to apply cultural knowledge to unforeseen circumstances that is not gained solely from memorizing the specifics of another culture. If our goal is to deploy people who have gained some predetermined level of competence, then we need to look at the skills and traits required to apply culture in terms other than memorizing the “Do’s and Don’ts” that are the cultural norms in Islamic, or any other, society. In addition this effort will likely benefit from a selection and recruitment process that will identify the personnel who can develop this level of competence.

From the 2013 United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Research Topics one of the topics for research is, *Cultural Vampires: why don’t we see our own reflection?*<sup>13</sup> That USSOCOM is asking this question underscores a need within the Special Operations Forces (SOF) to further develop cultural self-awareness in its professional military education and improve on the cultural capabilities of SOF. This is primarily because cross-cultural engagements are a crucial component of the traditional SOF missions. Two of the core SOF missions are Foreign Internal Defense and Unconventional Warfare that fall within the spectrum of Irregular Warfare that are expected to be the future of U.S. military operations. However to meet these requirements for Irregular Warfare operations in the future DOD will be

shifting some of those missions to the GPF who will be tasked with more of these traditional SOF roles. These roles will require a cross-culturally competent force that can operate effectively across culturally diverse environments.

### **What is Cross-Cultural Competence?**

*Every human has four endowments- self-awareness, conscience, independent will and creative imagination. These give us the ultimate human freedom... The power to choose to respond to change.*<sup>14</sup> -- Stephen R. Covey

*No letters after your name are ever going to be a total guarantee of competence any more than they are a guarantee against fraud. Improving competence involves continuing professional development ... That is the really crucial thing, not just passing an examination.*<sup>15</sup> – Colette Bowe

Understanding cross-cultural competence is not an insurmountable challenge even though it does not fit neatly into an understanding of most military skill sets like marksmanship or land navigation. First it is helpful to understand how to define competence and discriminate it from mastering skills or capabilities. Competence is generally thought of as an end state or proficiency, in part, based on the skills or capabilities that someone possesses. Competencies generally focus on the specific skills that need to be developed in order to be competent.<sup>16</sup> Understanding this matters because much of the focus within the military in the past, has been on teaching specific cultural skills such as language, gestures, knowledge of societal mores, and not the end state of being culturally competent. These cultural skills are very useful to develop when one is preparing to engage with cultural others.

As Colette Bowe illustrates above, competence is more about performance than the number of qualifications that a person possesses. There is often the assumption within the military that mastering skills will result in achieving competence.<sup>17</sup> This is similar to the assumption that anyone who can swim, shoot, run, or SCUBA dive, all core skills for a Naval Special Operator, can be a SEAL. It does not take into account the intangible traits found in the

character of a person that are required for finishing Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training and functioning as an integral part of a SEAL platoon. Knowing yourself well enough to push beyond one's comfort zone, developing trust in one's own character, and understanding how to motivate oneself are as important as mastering any competency in fulfilling that quest, **but are much harder to measure.**

The challenge is what does cross-cultural competence look like, and how do we leverage the most appropriate academic disciplines and incorporate them into a construct that works within the professional military education model. Should PME focus more on culture general or should DOD expand culture specific education? The question is relevant to this discussion because, as this paper will show cross-cultural competence is gained through a culture general approach. Culture general can be understood as a strategic approach to culture that prepares individuals with general knowledge that can be applied in many cross-cultural situations, and is developed throughout the career of a service member. Culture specific can be viewed as more of a tactical approach of how to conduct oneself when engaged with a specific culture and is typically conducted during a few hours of predeployment training.

Given the breadth of different cultures (National, Ethnic, Organizational....) that a practitioner is likely to interact with on any given day and the limited time that can be devoted to additional PME it is fair to ask, “which core components of cross-cultural competence provide the most fidelity towards successful engagement?” This discussion will focus on cultural self-awareness as it relates to successful cross-cultural engagements conducted by the military. The goal of these engagements can be multi-faceted and can include, but is not limited to, building the capability of foreign partners, fostering better relations with former adversaries, or conducting humanitarian and disaster relief operations.

Interactions during intercultural engagement often require that someone be able to utilize all of his or her prior experience and background knowledge to accurately see how a situation is unfolding. The ability to see a situation and respond appropriately was well known to Clausewitz. “When all is said and done, it is really the commander’s coup d’oeil, his ability to see things simply, to identify the whole business of war completely with himself, that is the essence of good generalship. Only if the mind works in the comprehensive fashion can it achieve the freedom it needs to dominate events and not be dominated by them.”<sup>18</sup> Clausewitz believed that coup d’oeil, the ability to quickly see a battlefield and understand the situation, was part of the genius that makes for a successful military commander. That same ability to see and quickly understand can be applied to successful cross-cultural engagements.

No cross-cultural engagement can be scripted so that each side knows how to interpret with 100% accuracy the cues given by the other side. Appropriate response to unexpected turns and cues often determines success and prevents the friction that can influence operational success. That appropriate response is often guided by more than just a “map study” of the cultural environment prior to engagement. In short a person must have knowledge gained through study and experience and also the traits that allow them to quickly see, understand, and

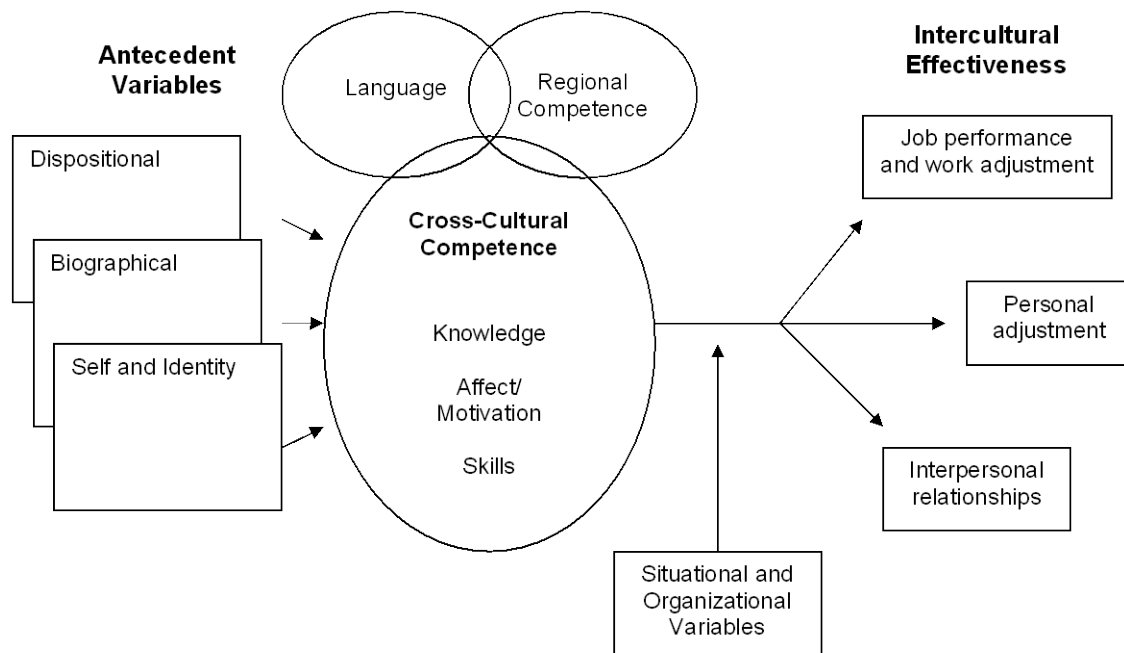


appropriately respond to the dynamics of a cross-cultural situation. This leads us to a discussion on which traits are important, how to further develop those traits, and can we select people with a propensity for successful intercultural engagement?

Dr. Allison Abbe, a cultural psychologist, has written much of the literature on cultural competence for the U.S. Army and provides a definition of cross-cultural competence that is similar to that of Selmeski. “Cross-cultural competence is defined here as an individual capability that contributes to intercultural effectiveness regardless of the particular intersection of cultures.”<sup>19</sup> This cross-cultural competence requires a person to have the interpersonal skills to interact appropriately with individuals from other cultures and then when presented unfamiliar cultural cues adapt their behavior and responses in a culturally appropriate manner.

In a 2007 work Abbe et al described a model that provided both precursor components and expected outcomes of cultural competence, shown in figure 1.<sup>20</sup> Their proposal provides a discussion of the antecedent variables associated with successful cross-cultural competence.<sup>21</sup> The general framework that they provide focused, in large part, on three groups of antecedent variables. They identified personality traits and discussed the supporting evidence as it relates to job performance in multicultural situations. They identified biographical components such as prior experience, gender, and age. Third are variables associated with self and identity (self-efficacy and cultural identity).<sup>22</sup> Their framework for cross-cultural competence is shown figure 2.<sup>23</sup>

**Figure 1, Depiction of Cross-Cultural Competence and Intercultural Effectiveness**



24

**Figure 2, Three Components of Cross-Cultural Competence**

Knowledge and Cognition	Affect and Motivation	Skills
Cultural awareness	Attitudes and initiative	Interpersonal skills
Cross-cultural schema	Empathy	Self-regulation
Cognitive complexity	Need for closure	Flexibility

25

Abbe further elucidates this framework in an article in *Parameters* (XXXIX, 2009) when she discusses professional military education and leader development. In the article she argues that cultural knowledge when not accompanied by affect and skills is insufficient for military personnel.<sup>26</sup> Within the Knowledge and Cognition component cultural self-awareness developed through cultural awareness, is a part of cross-cultural thought structure and the ability to detect cultural nuance or subtle differences in cultural interactions. While the study of cultural self-awareness does not lend itself to empirical evaluation in the traditional sense, analysis of recent and current literature supports that the development of cultural competence is facilitated by cultural self-awareness. Psychology provides us with several models to help evaluate an individual's aptitude for intercultural competence and for understanding the component traits that improve the chance for success.

McClosky et al submitted a report to the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences in 2010 in which they propose a mission-centric model of cross-cultural competence for the Army.<sup>27</sup> They conducted an analysis of existing cross-cultural competence models that provide information on the core components of cross-cultural competence and for assessing the general aptitude for cross-cultural competence.<sup>28</sup> They used that analysis to develop a cross-cultural competence model that they believe provides a framework of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities (KSAA's) that facilitate cross-cultural competence.

The general framework developed by Abbe et al for cross-cultural competence heavily influences their model in which they identified a list of twenty-eight KSAA's that they determined influenced mission focused cross-cultural competence.<sup>29</sup> They used interviews of 50 redeploying soldiers of varying ranks, occupational specialties, and ages to determine which of the KSAA's appeared consistently and were valuable to mission success. These KSAA's are

broken out into three groups, Cognitive, Affective/Attitude, and Behavioral that are shown in figure 3.<sup>30</sup> Soldiers with a great deal of ethnocentrism appeared to score the lowest in cross-cultural competence. Of the KSAA's identified, Self-awareness/Self-monitoring and Awareness of cultural differences appear to provide the most rationality to the thesis regarding cultural self-awareness.

It is challenging to find empirical data that shows the value of cultural self-awareness. The data seen from researching cultural interactions is more qualitative than quantitative and does not lend it self to the same type of scrutiny seen in randomized controlled trials used in medical research. That lack of empirical data does not necessarily invalidate the importance of cultural self-awareness because the concept does appear with frequency and regularity in both psychology and anthropology literature. This discussion will explain why this understanding of one's own cultural narrative is a key milestone to develop in the progression to becoming cross-culturally competent.

**Figure 3, Instances of Cross-Cultural Competencies in Mission Settings**

<i>Components with related KSAs</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
<b>Cognitive</b>	
Perspective-taking	122
Anticipate/Predict	62
Awareness of cultural differences	49
Diagnose nature of resistance	49
“Big picture” mentality	47
Self-awareness/Self-monitoring	39
Interpretation	36
Observation	33
Frame Shifting	23
Planning	25
<b>Affective/Attitude</b>	
Cultural openness	98
Open-mindedness	83
Willingness to engage	76
Emotional empathy	64
Dedication (going “above & beyond”)	58
Self/Emotional regulation	41
Withhold on closure	40
Patience	39
Tolerance for ambiguity	20
Emotional endurance	17
Self-efficacy	16
Resilience	14
<b>Behavioral</b>	
Self-presentation	101
Relationship-building	89
Rapport-building	73
Manipulate/Persuade	70
Flexibility	42
Communication Skills	31
Leveraging own personality attributes	13

31

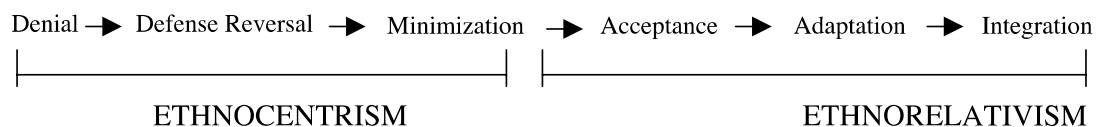
## Ethnocentrism/Ethnorelativism

*In Paris they simply opened their eyes and stared when I spoke to them in French; I never did succeed in making those idiots understand their language.*<sup>32</sup> – Mark Twain

Earlier the term “cultural vampire” was introduced, as an analogy for someone who is unable to see his or her own cultural reflection. The proposition is that our view of ourselves is distorted by the way we understand our own cultural narrative or how we interpret the way that others view us. Put simply, just as we have difficulty overtly recognizing our own voices on a recording, we have the same difficulty recognizing how others see us in a relationship or how we believe we are seen. Basically what this describes is a type of ethnocentrism, a pattern of behavior and belief that places central importance on your own ethnic group.<sup>33</sup> This misperception can result in miscommunication and subsequent actions that are detrimental to mission success.

Bennett has researched ethnocentrism and its role in intercultural relationships. He developed a model for measuring intercultural sensitivity that looks at ethnocentrism in terms of a progression during which a person moves along a spectrum of being more ethnocentric or less culturally competent towards ethnorelativism and becoming more interculturally competent.<sup>34 35</sup>

**Figure 4, Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity orientations**



36

Understanding ethnocentrism is important if one is to appreciate his or her own cultural narrative. Ethnocentrism is a trait that is perceived by many as a negative belief system but also serves as a survival behavior to unite societies or groups against outside threats.<sup>37</sup> “Most people are ethnocentric, and a certain degree of ethnocentrism probably is essential if people are to be

content with their lives and if their culture is to persist.”<sup>38</sup> However, it is important to recognize how ethnocentrism limits our ability to accurately see cultural others or interpret cultural cues and increases the possibility of misunderstanding or misrepresentation during cultural engagement. In his book *Military Orientalism* Porter describes the influence of our culture on how we view “non-western warfare.” What he describes is an ethnocentric view of eastern war and how that view can be an obstacle to analytical objectivity.<sup>39</sup> He goes on to emphasize that in order to have that objectivity an “observer must become aware of their own cultural perspective and quirks, and achieve distance from them, in order to appraise others more successfully.”<sup>40</sup>

Bennett coined the term “ethnorelativism” to represent the opposite of ethnocentrism on his spectrum of intercultural development.<sup>41</sup> The goal is to understand a cultural phenomenon in the same way that someone within that culture would understand the same event. The utility of this level of understanding is that during any type of engagement with cultural others you are less likely to misinterpret situations and thereby able to react in a constructive manner. In Bennett’s model of intercultural development, cultural self-awareness is an issue that needs to be resolved in order to transition from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. The consequence is, without the development of cultural self-awareness you will have difficulty discriminating the differences among other cultures because they are seen as a reflection of one’s own culture.<sup>42</sup> **As one moves from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, one no longer asks, “What would I do in this situation?” but “What would someone from this culture do in this situation?”**

This un-biased judgment and cultural interpretation is the ultimate goal for service members to develop prior to interaction with cultural others. This judgment can be challenged when service members have to transition from kinetic combat operations one day to conducting civilian-military relations the next day. However, failure to make this transition can result in an inability to accurately understand or influence the behavior of people from other cultures, which

is often central to achieving success during military to civilian or military to military engagement.

### **Cultural Self-Awareness**

*...no matter where operations are located on the spectrum of violence, they are about people. Hostile, neutral, or friendly, people are the center of gravity in what militaries do.*<sup>43</sup> — Salmoni & Holmes-Eber

If you were ask nearly anyone in the U.S. “who are you” you would likely get any number of answers. This is partly because identity can be influenced by a large number of factors that include but are not limited to; family, religion, social groups, employment, educational institutions, and in the military, service affiliation. So understanding cultural self-identity or self-awareness can be a challenge for many. How do we understand our cultural self-identity and more importantly how do we understand the way it influences our interpretation of the world around us?

There are many ways to understand the role of culture and society however anthropology provides us with, to use a currency term, the “gold standard.” To use a medical analogy, trying to understand culture and society without the contribution of anthropology is like a physician practicing medicine without understanding the anatomy and physiology of the human body. For example in every society there are social mores and rules that bind that society together and enable it to continue and thrive. If children within those societies were not raised to understand, accept, and abide by those social rules—the culture of that society—the society would change, potentially even break down, and/or dissipate.

This complex understanding of how societies develop is important for this discussion because it is what provides a basis for understanding cultural self-identity and cross-cultural competence. Dr. Brian Selmeski who provided the definition of cross-cultural in the introduction is an anthropologist at the U.S. Air Force Culture and Language Center. In a 2007 paper he



proposed his definition to facilitate a path forward in developing cultural competence within the U.S. military. In this discussion he emphasized that this competence will facilitate interactions on an operational level, with those within one's own service component, other services, agencies, allies, adversaries, and non-combatants.<sup>44</sup>

A critical component that is not discussed directly in that definition but is implied by Selmeski in his second point is the importance of cultural self-identity.<sup>45</sup> He further developed that understanding of "cultural self-identity" and proposes it as a entry-level building block towards achieving cross-cultural competency.<sup>46</sup> This is an initial milestone, in which one realizes that everything they understand about their world is seen through their own cultural narrative, in the development of cross-cultural competence. This is the foundational milestone in developing cross-cultural competence simply because, as Delpit suggests, it is how we understand our world and what allows us to appreciate how we appear to other cultures. This understanding enables us to ground our interactions and communications in an overall competency because we are able to recognize our own cultural cues and how they affect our interaction with others.

Recognizing cultural self-identity as a primary milestone towards becoming cross-culturally competent is important however it does not address how to screen the potential of individuals for developing intercultural sensitivity. The international business world has been looking at this complex problem for years and for good reason; often their bottom-line is determined by the success or failure of cross-cultural business ventures. While cross-cultural interaction on a tactical level in the military can be quite different from a business negotiation the business model does provide the most empirical research on cross-cultural interaction,<sup>47</sup> much of which may be transferrable. Bennett's model is well accepted in the international education and business community as way to assess someone's sensitivity for becoming interculturally competent and has been studied for validity.<sup>48</sup>

In the 2011 Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities the Department of Defense recognized the value of being able to select those within the force who can successfully develop cross-cultural skills.<sup>49</sup> In the military we have a strong service culture and military educational programs need to leverage an understanding of that culture and how it affects the way we perceive the world around us. The military should view cross-cultural competence as a dynamic or continuously evolving ability and work to develop that ability through professional military education and practical experience. Bennett's model may provide an instrument for measuring that evolution of cultural sensitivity in someone. The primary benefit of models like Bennett's is the ability to determine whether someone is more ethnocentric or ethnorelative in their cultural development and adjust their training accordingly. However DOD will likely need to develop its own instrument based on a similar model.

DOD's strategic plan for cultural capability is considering utilizing the current personnel systems that track language proficiency to develop performance measures for culture as well as language and regional expertise.<sup>50</sup> While language capability and regional expertise are linked to culture, instruments that measure these capabilities would only serve, at best, as surrogate markers for cross-cultural competence. Language and regional expertise are both knowledge bases that are easily measured by objective instruments.<sup>51</sup> Cross-cultural competence is a metacognitive ability and may not be suited for the same type of assessment technique that is used to measure language skills or regional knowledge.<sup>52</sup> As development of the curriculum for cross-cultural competence progresses DOD may need consider incorporating the best practices of international business and education models to improve outcomes within the force.

## Conclusion

*Culture is not a thing, an artifact. It is more useful to think of it as a prism, something that distorts the vision but in knowable (nonrandom) ways. –Jessica G. Turnley*

In physician assistant school, I learned the core competencies to function as a clinician that did prepare me to pass my certification examination. However, this is not what made me a competent clinician. I developed that competence through clinical engagement with patients, learning to communicate effectively, and further mentorship provided by my attending physicians. Part of that competence required that I recognize that I often held preconceptions that could cloud my objectivity or ability to communicate with patients from other cultures and that I needed to realize when to set those previously held views aside. That ability to communicate more effectively by understanding yourself and how others see you applies just as much to engaging with locals of a village in West Africa or with interagency partners during a disaster relief operation as it does to an engagement with patients in a clinical environment.

Most young people who enter the military service do so with years of cultural influences developed through their family, religious upbringing, and social groups and with little exposure to the cross-cultural interactions that help them to understand how those cultural narratives influence their actions. If Irregular Warfare is indeed the future of military conflict for the U.S. as proposed by Dr. Sebastian Gorka to the Marine Corps University Command and Staff students effective cross-cultural exchanges will become more important to the success of U.S. national policy.<sup>53</sup> This success will be dependent on DOD developing competent service members who can function in an interagency environment as easily as they can with a foreign culture. “The wrong man can do more harm than the right man can do good.”<sup>54</sup>

The challenge ahead for the military is implementing effective professional military education that can address cross-cultural competence and then develop the methods to measure

the effectiveness of that education. It is beyond the scope of this paper to propose a specific roadmap to be used by the military to achieve that competence when others such as Selmeski are currently developing that pathway.<sup>55</sup> The goal of this paper is to demonstrate that cultural self-awareness or self-identity is one of the initial, and critical, milestones in the development of the cross-cultural competence that is the goal of future military cultural education programs.

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<sup>1</sup> Sunzi, and Samuel B. Griffith. *The Art of War*. London: Oxford University Press, 1971. p 78

<sup>2</sup> "Department of Defense Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities"

<sup>3</sup> Selmeski, *Military Cross-Cultural Competence: Core Concepts and Individual Development*, p12

<sup>4</sup> United States, U.S. Senate, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs*, April 11, 2005, section goes here, accessed April 8, 2013, <http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/media/majority-media/lieberman-building-upon-9/11-reforms-passed-last-year>.

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<sup>7</sup> "Department of Defense Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities," [Http://prhome.defense.gov/](http://prhome.defense.gov/), 2011, section goes here, <http://prhome.defense.gov/rfm/READINESS/DLNSEO/files/STRAT%20PLAN.pdf>, p 7.

<sup>8</sup> "Department of Defense Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities," p 16.

<sup>9</sup> "Department of Defense Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities," p 10.

<sup>10</sup> "Quadrennial Defense Review Report," Department of Defense, February 2010, section goes here, accessed March 4, 2013, p 69  
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<sup>12</sup> Barak Obama. "National Security Strategy." The White House. May 27, 2010. Accessed January 13, 2013.  
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- <sup>18</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz et al., *On War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), pg. #. p 578
- <sup>19</sup> Abbe, Allison, Lisa M.V. Gulick, and Jeffrey L. Herman. *Cross-Cultural Competence in Army Leaders A Conceptual and Empirical Foundation*. October 2007. Accessed January 20, 2013. <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army/sr2008-01.pdf>. p 2
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- <sup>21</sup> Abbe et al Cross-Cultural Competence in Army Leaders
- <sup>22</sup> Abbe et al Cross-Cultural Competence in Army Leaders
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- <sup>24</sup> Abbe et al Cross-Cultural Competence in Army Leaders, p 2
- <sup>25</sup> Abbe et al Cross-Cultural Competence in Army Leaders, p13
- <sup>26</sup> Abbe & Halpin, p24
- <sup>27</sup> Michael J. McClosky et al., *Assessing the Development of Cross-Cultural Competence in Soldiers*, November 2007, section goes here, accessed January 20, 2013, Assessing the Development of Cross-Cultural Competence in Soldiers.
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- <sup>29</sup> McClosky et al, *Assessing the Development of Cross-Cultural Competence in Soldiers*, p12
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- <sup>43</sup> Barak A. Salmoni and Paula Holmes-Eber, *Operational Culture for the Warfighter: Principles and Applications* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University ; Washington, DC, 2008), pg. #. 3
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